



Testimony for the Appropriations Committee

February 21, 2017

My name is Dr. Christine Carver and I proudly serve as the Superintendent of the Bethel Public Schools. First, I would like to thank the committee for providing me with the opportunity to testify regarding the Governor's proposed cuts to ECS, Excess Cost requiring towns to pay 1/3 of the Teachers Retirement System Contribution and the impact it will have on the children of Bethel. In Bethel, our primary purpose is to improve student achievement and ensure our students are college and career ready to enter the global workforce. I am not one to exaggerate words, but put simply - these cuts would devastate our system.

We pride ourselves in Bethel with maintaining high levels of student achievement, given a shifting demographic student population. Our percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch increased 13% over the past 10 years. Our English language learner population has increased dramatically. And unlike other communities, our enrollment is not dropping, in fact, it is rising. When we poll our new parents, many move to our community for the quality education children in Bethel receive and extracurricular opportunities we provide our students. We work hard to maintain fiscal efficiency, while adapting to those changing needs.

An approximate \$4.2 million dollar cut to the Bethel Public Schools represents a 9% cut to our operating budget. Schools are a people business. 85% of our operating budget is in salary and benefits. For the system to sustain such a cut, and we looked at it proportionally to our overall staffing ratios, it would mean laying off 49-50 teachers, 2 administrators, 5 secretaries, 17 Paraprofessionals, 1 nurse and 5 custodians or conservatively 79 positions. While clearly the impact on individuals would be substantial, it also results in significant reductions in programs for students. These are the likely impacts these types of cuts would make:

- Our class size would increase significantly with ranges from 24-26 at the elementary level and even higher at the secondary level.
- Our administration, which is already lean, would need to be reduced. We would not be able to implement the mandates within teacher evaluation nor several of the many unfunded mandates which are heavily reliant on administrative support.
- We are seeing more students with behavioral and psychiatric needs. With this type of cut, we would have to significantly reduce our support staff, including those who provide mental health and counseling support.
- Bethel prides itself on a rigorous school experience, however, we would have to make significant cuts to Advanced Placement and/or Early College Experience programs for students and we would have to reduce elective options at the high school and middle school.

- We have worked to create a system of intervention for students who have academic deficits in literacy and mathematics which potentially avoids costly special education services. With this cut, we would have little to no services to meet those needs. That would mean approximately 521 students in our school system would not get the support they need.
- We have established a research based coaching program which supports the professional learning of teachers, thereby increasing student outcomes. That program would be dismantled, if not eliminated.
- We have implemented a secondary 1 student to 1 device model to integrate technology into our teaching and learning. Technology is as important today as a pencil was when public schools first started. These cuts would not only impact the ability to purchase devices, but also the ability to support them.
- We have pride in the preschool programs we provide as a mechanism for early intervention. We would need to cut that back to the level of mandated special education programming.
- Our nationally recognized music program would be significantly cut back – as would the arts in general.
- We would have to reduce our nationally recognized NJROTC program at Bethel High School.
- Our newly created Career Pathways at Bethel High School developed in partnership with local business and industry would need to be scaled back.

We know that the total school experience goes beyond the school day.

- We would likely have to eliminate freshman sports programs and significantly cut back on our after-school and/or extra-curricular options.
- Our musical and theater opportunities would be significantly scaled back.

Our system would go from one of excellence to one of mediocrity. We strive to be a shining example of public education in Connecticut to the rest of the country. If Connecticut does not continue to be a leader in education, then we will lose the future of our children. I urge you not to support the Governor's proposed cuts and restore all funding to previous levels.